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FORTUNES WASHED AWAY

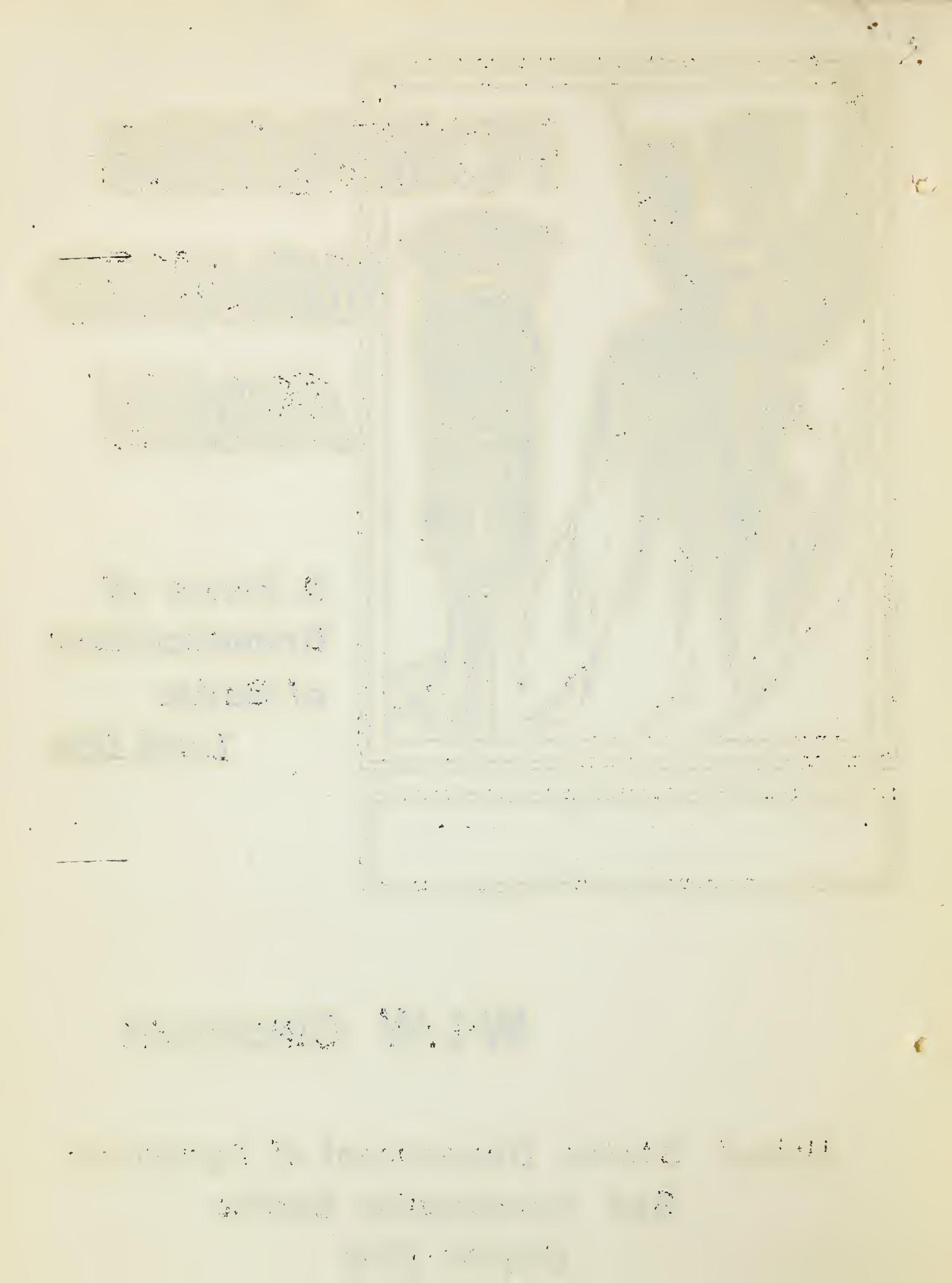
A Series of
Dramatizations
of Better
Land Use

No. 129 October 12, 1940 1:15 p.m.

"TENNESSEE TALES"

W·L·W CINCINNATI

United States Department of Agriculture
Soil Conservation Service
Dayton · Ohio



SOUND: Thunder and rain...

ANNOUNCER

Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN THEME: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

ANNOUNCER

From the Great Smoky Mountains, with their laurel and rhododendron, to the levees of the Mississippi, with their cotton wharves and their time-honored paddlewheel steamboats, sprawls Tennessee--Tennessee, a great state, a great agricultural state. And many a small Tennessee town has its Liar's Bench, gathering place for the local historians, yarn-spinners, and wags. Here, when the sun pauses in a dusty afternoon sky, when heat-monkeys shimmer across the public square and the foliage of the trees on the courthouse lawn hangs in limp tatters, when the distant barking of a dog and the slow voices of the loafers sound remote and unreal, you'll find them--the tellers of folk lore, story tellers of America, and Tennessee. Many stories are pure fabrication, many wistful thinking, many true. (FADE).

MARIAN

Don't you wish you were back on the stage, Uncle Jim?

JIM

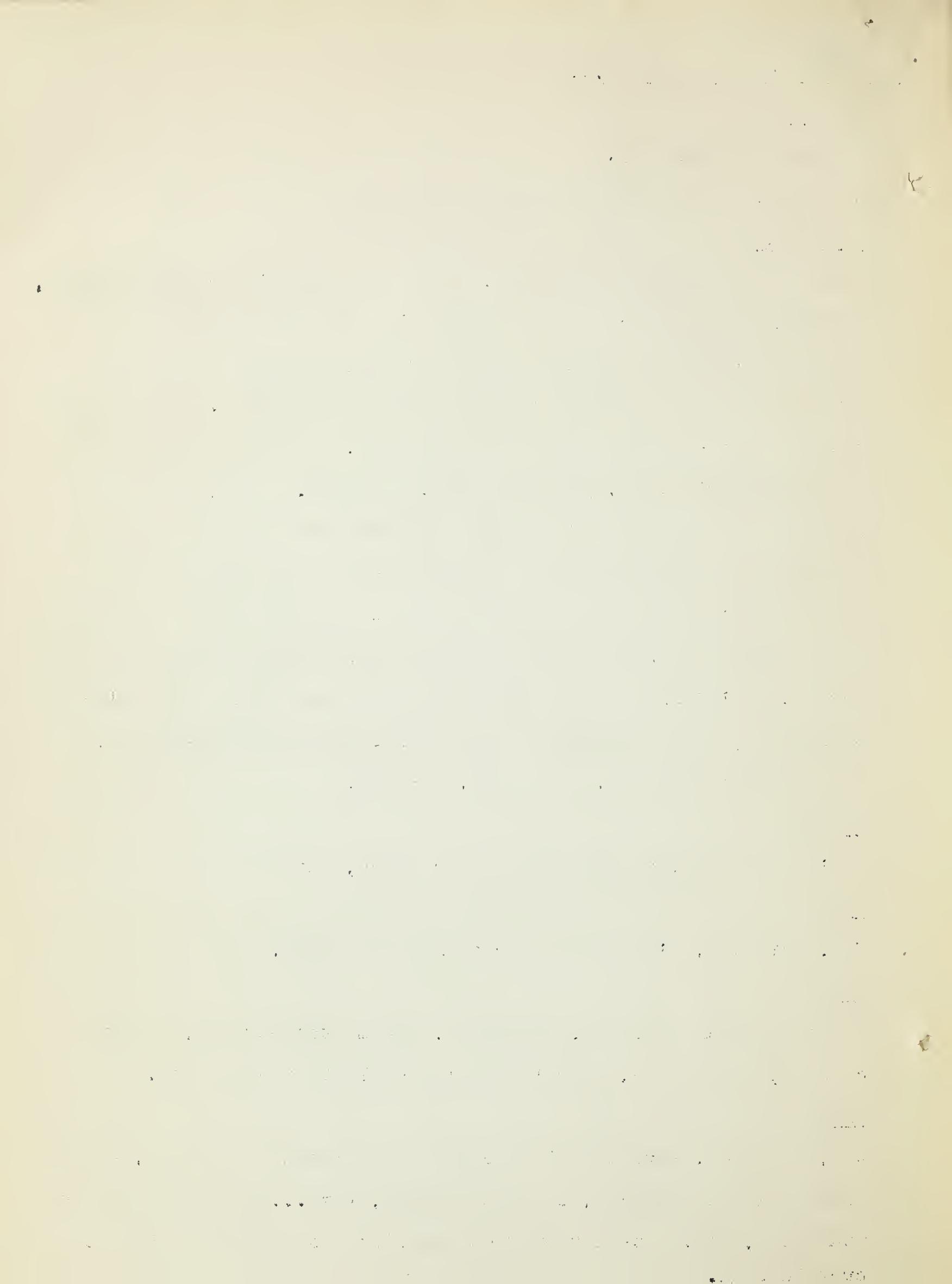
Who, me? Why, I'm too old for such foolishness.

ED

I think Marian is right, Uncle Jim. No matter how old, as you call it, you may be, there's still the old trouper in you.

JIM

Why, children, I've trod the boards from Altoona to Topeka, from Pewee Valley, Kentucky, to East Dubuque, Iowa...and right here in Tennessee, too. But I know when the old pins begin to give the curtain sign.



MARIAN

Gee, I wish I could be a great actress someday.

ED

Me, too.

JIM

You, an actress, Ed? (ALL LAUGH)

ED

Aw, you know what I mean. But I've heard you tell stories, and...

MARIAN

Why don't you tell us one, Uncle Jim?

JIM (TRYING NOT TO ACT PLEASED)

Oh, now, I....

ED

Yeah, come on.

JIM

Well, if you insist...but suppose you act this out with me, Ed.

You say you want to become an "actress". Now, I'll play the part of Old Man Bill Blowdy, and you can be....(FADE)

SOUND: Knock on door...

BLOWDY (from inside)

Who's there?

MELVIN

It's me. Just me and my hound dog Bulger.

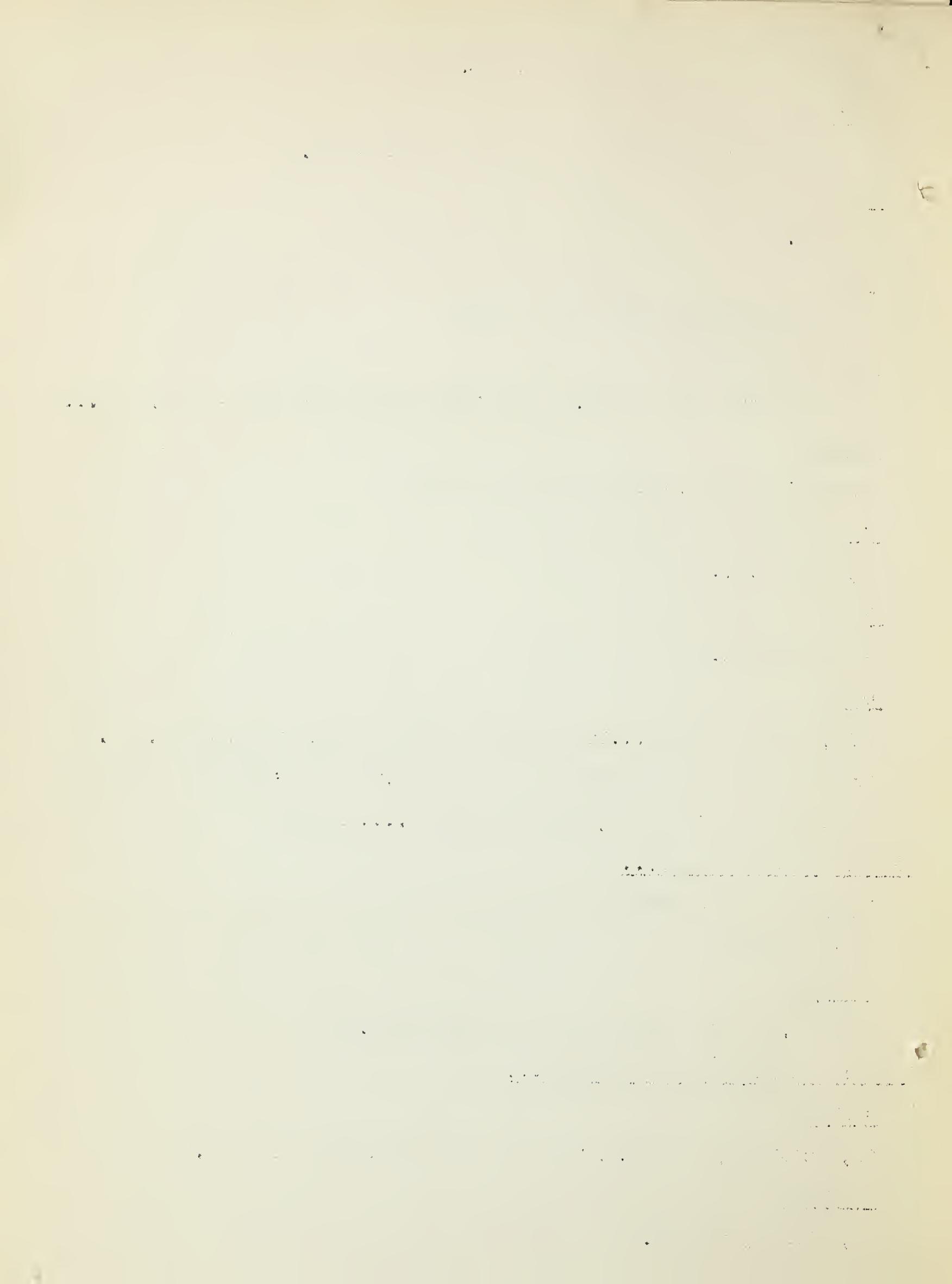
SOUND: Cabin door creaks open...

BLOWDY

Oh, it's you, Melvin. Come in and rest and eat a bite.

MELVIN

No, thank you, sir.



BLOWDY

Well, why not?

MELVIN

Well, you see, Mister Old Man Bill Blowdy, I'm going to town. It's forty miles and across two counties but I aim to see that town. That's why I came to see you.

BLOWDY

Now, now, Young Melvin...I'm hard up for money right now. I couldn't loan my sweet mother, now in heaven praise be, so much as a penny.

MELVIN

I don't want no money. I ain't the borrowing kind.

BLOWDY

What can I do for you then?

MELVIN

Well, it's like this. You're my twenty-third cousin, my only kin in this world since pappy died. I got a favor for you to do for me.

BLOWDY

No favors, my boy. I make it a rule to do no favors and don't expect none from anybody.

MELVIN

It's a favor I'm aiming to pay for.

BLOWDY (CHANGING HIS TUNE)

Oh, that's different now. Come right in, Young Melvin.

MELVIN

No sir, no need to come in, for I'd just be coming out again. What I want you to do is keep my fox hound Bulger while I'm off on my travels. I'll pay his keep, I'll pay what's right when I come back to get him.



BLOWDY

Just a minute. (OFF AND MUMBLING TO HIMSELF) Heh, heh. Everybody knows Young Melvin is simple. Honest, yes, but simple as the day is long. Here's a way I can make myself something extra, and get a good fox hound too. (THEN BACK TO MELVIN) Why, yes....Why, yes, I'll keep Bulger for you, Young Melvin, and glad to.

MELVIN

Gee, thanks Mister Old Man Bill Blowdy. I'll be back next week or month or sometime. I don't know how long it'll be, 'cause it's forty miles and across two counties to town.

ORGAN: BRIEF BRIDGE DENOTING LAPSE OF TIME.

SOUND: Knocking on door....door opens....

BLOWDY

Oh, it's you, Young Melvin. How are you.

MELVIN

Fair to middling. Walked to town and saw the sights and then walked back here again. Don't never want to roam no more. I'm satisfied now.

BLOWDY

Well, glad to hear it. Next time you come down to the crossroads, drop in and say hello. Any time, just any time, Young Melvin.

SOUND: Door closes....

MELVIN (Shouting)

Hold there! Wait a minute.

SOUND: Door opens...

BLOWDY

I'm busy, Young Melvin.

MELVIN

How about Bulger, Old Man Bill Blowdy? How about him?

BLOWDY

Why, I....



MELVIN

I mean my fox hound!

BLOWDY

Oh, him? Why, I declare to my soul I'd almost forgot that hound dog. I sure almost had.

MELVIN

Where's he at?

BLOWDY

I'll tell you. I feel mighty bad about it, but Bulger is no more.

MELVIN

How come? What do you mean?

BLOWDY

Why, he's perished and gone, Young Melvin. The first night after you left I locked him up in that little busted-down house over there. Well sir, those last renters of mine that lived there was powerful dirty folks. They left the place just lousy with chinch bugs. Them bugs was mortal hungry by this time. So they just eat that Bulger of yours alive. Eat all but the poor thing's bones by morning--and the bones was pretty well gnawed.

MELVIN (SORROWFULLY)

Oh, gee...

BLOWDY

It was my fault in one way. I ought to known better than put your dog in there. But I done it. So I won't charge you one penny for his keep the night I had him. I aim to do the fair thing.

MELVIN

That dog was folks to me. Them chinch bugs don't know what they done to me.



BLOWDY

I'm sorry, Young Melvin. Goodbye.

MELVIN

Oh, say, Mister Old Man Bill Blowdy...my place is way over the hill and a good piece further. I'm beat out and tired. Wonder if you'd loan me your mule to ride on? I'll bring it back tomorrow.

BLOWDY

Why, sure. He's over there by that thicket.

MELVIN (fading)

Thanks ever so much. I'll bring him back tomorrow...

ORGAN: BRIEF BRIDGE DEVOTING LAPSE OF TIME.

BLOWDY (fading in and out of breath)

Blast your hide, Young Melvin....what a walk over here....say, where's my mule?

MELVIN

I feel mighty bad about that mule, Mister Old Man Blowdy. I sure do.

BLOWDY

What do you mean!

MELVIN

Well sir, I rode that mule to the top of the hill. I was minding my own business and not giving anybody any trouble. All of a sudden I see a turkey buzzard dropping down out of the sky. Here it come, dropping fast and crowing like a game rooster. First thing I know, that old buzzard just grabbed your mule by the tail and I lit on a rock, head-on. When I could see straight, first thing I see was that buzzard sailing away with the mule, most a mile high and getting littler all the time.



BLOWDY

Hold on there! I've seen many a turkey buzzard in my time, but never a one that could crow.

MELVIN

Well, it surprised me some too. But in a county where chinch bugs can eat up a full-grown fox hound in one night, why I just reckon a turkey buzzard has a right to crow and fly off with a mule if he wants too. (FADE)

(EVERYBODY LAUGHS)

MARIAN

That's a nice bit of acting, Ed. Of course, Uncle Jim...you were grand as usual.

JIM

Thank you, my dear. Of course, you know how it ended....Old Man Bill Blowdy gave up Bulger, and then Young Melvin gave back the mule.

ED

And everybody lived happily ever after.

MARIAN

Any more storics?

JIM

What, isn't that one enough?

MARIAN

I'd say it's a bit on the far-fetched side.

JIM

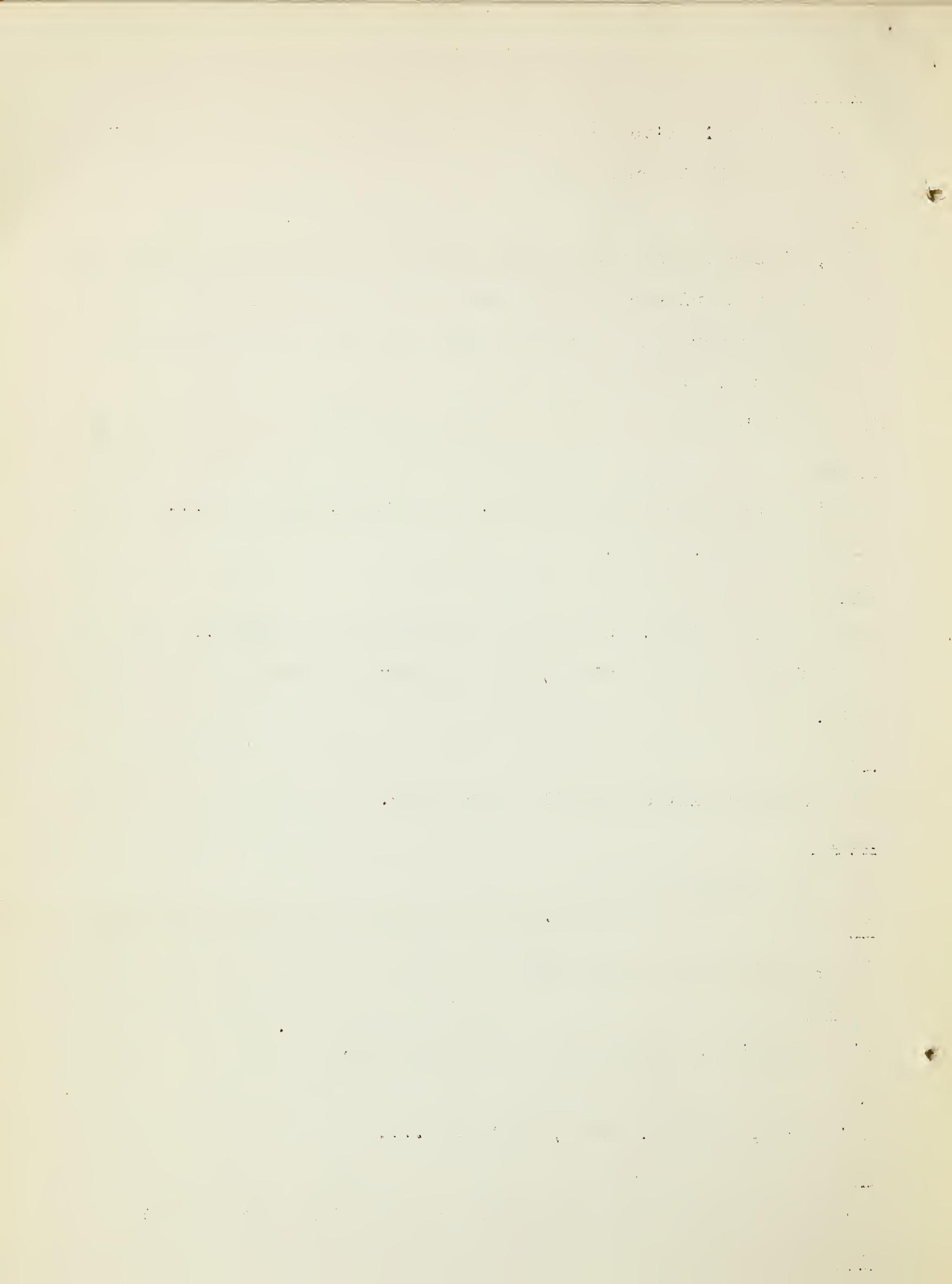
It's true, my dear. Well, let's see....

ED

How about the one when Hulett Crossway bought a Locomobile?

JIM

Oh, now, I've told that so many times....



MARIAN

Not to me, you haven't.

ED

It's a lulu, Marian. Come on, Uncle Jim. But no acting for me this time. I'm going to rest on my laurels.

JIM

Well, when Hulett Crossway bought a Locomobile it made some stir up and down Painter Creek. He'd drive it up and down the road, hollering "gee" and "haw" and "whoa", and making everybody get out of the way.

MARIAN

I'll bet they did, too.

JIM

Not always, though they tried to. Usually he would end up in a ditch, or in somebody's fence, or by running into somebody's wagon. He had a horn that went like this:

SOUND: Toot of old fashioned horn...

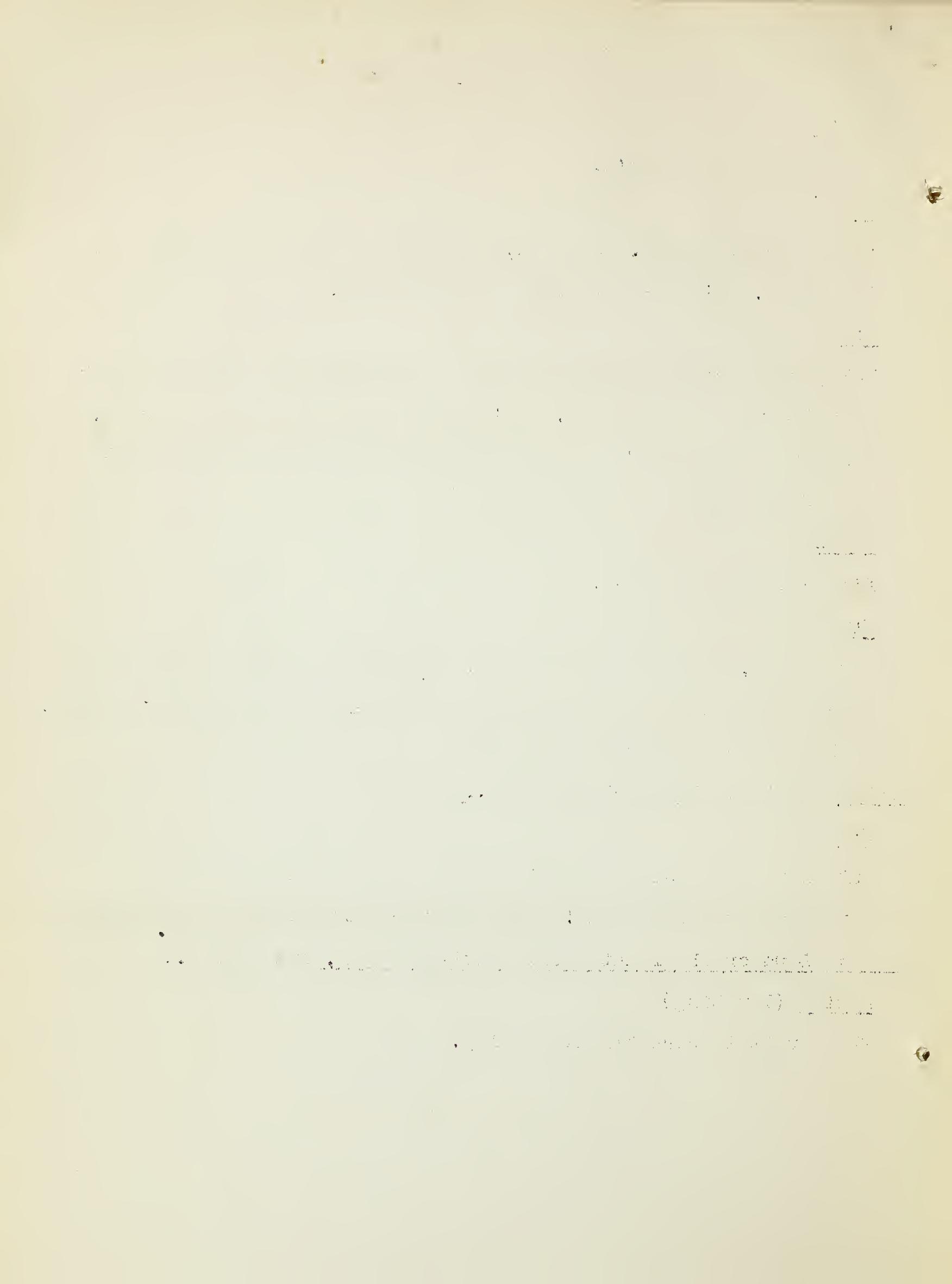
JIM

But instead of using it, he'd stick his head out and holler, "Everybody out of the way!" And it would usually end up like this:

SOUND: Loud crash of automobile hitting wagon, and bedlam...

MARIAN (laughing)

That ought to cure him eventually.



JIM

It did. He sold the blamed thing. Said it hadn't been trained when it was young. You see, that was when automobiles were just coming in, and he had the first down Painter Creek. But before long, they became thicker and thicker. He got so he hated the sight or hearing of an auto. He spread glass on the road, and got put in jail for it. When he got out, he went to Sunday services to preach against the automobile, and broke up the services by getting into a fight.

ED

He must have been a hard-headed cuss.

JIM

Not hard-headed, just independent. He was the only man in the county that didn't sing low when the sheriff came 'round. And he used to say, "If I ain't the best man around here, I'll eat a red bull and it bollering." Nobody ever took him up on it.

ED

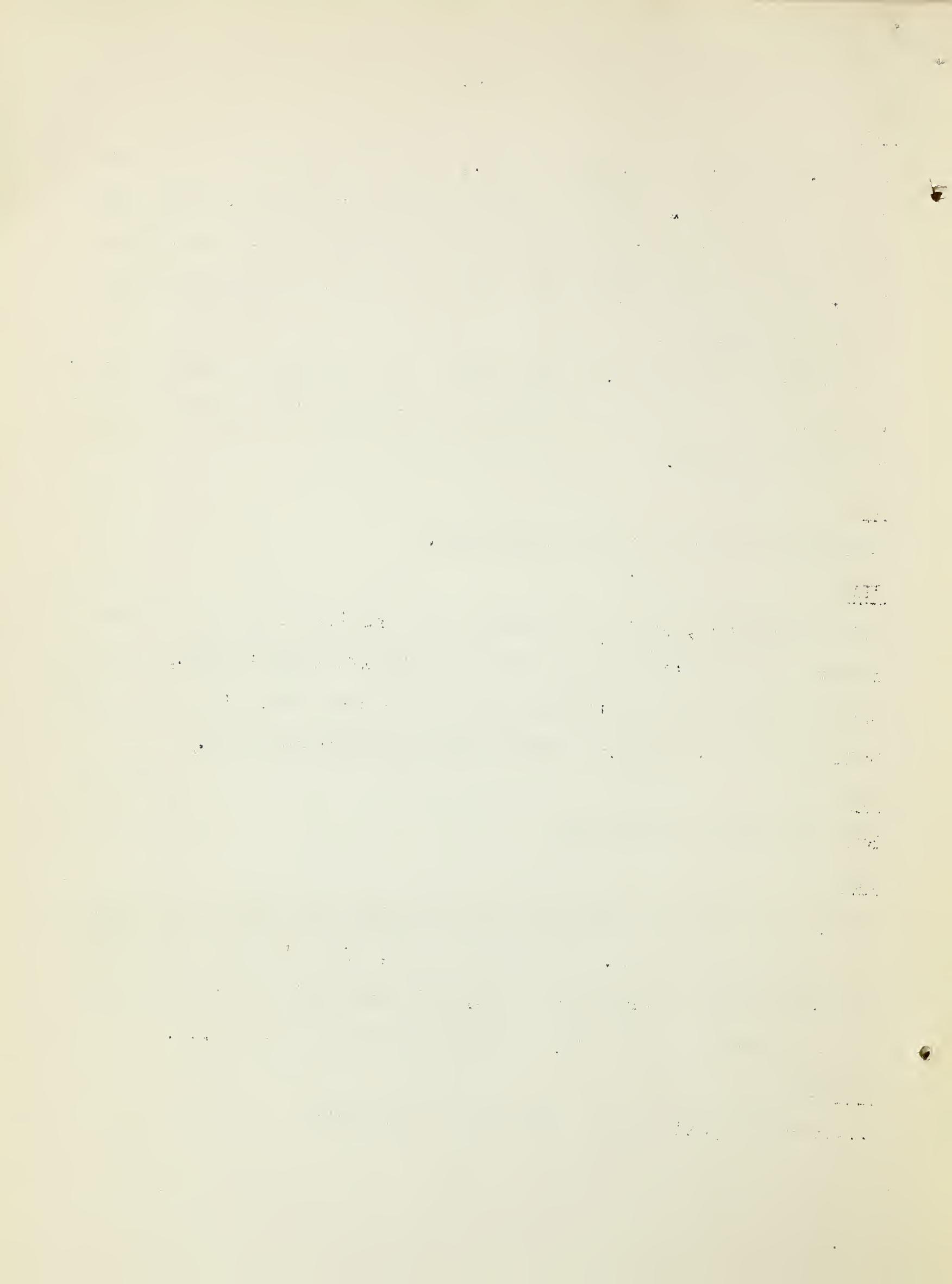
But what finally happened?

JIM

Well, sir, he got to shooting at cars with his 8-gage, and they put him in jail again. When he got out, him and his boys built barb-wire fences across the road, and back into the clink again he goes. When he got out, he plowed up the road, and....

MARIAN

....back to jail again. And when he got out?



JIM

This time he fooled them, but not himself. He plowed up his pasture. All of the folks began to talk. Instead of plowing round the hill, like the other hill farmers, he began to plow up and down, and it wasn't long till that hillsode looked like a piece of pants-leg corduroy. They sure knew he was touched, or that he'd had too much "popskull" the night before.

MARIAN

Looks like his farm would wash away, plowing up and down like that.

JIM

That's what happened, just as he meant it to. When the first big rain came, it sounded like somebody was beating carpets and driving stobs at one and the same time. The soil washed down from the hill, onto the road. He blocked the road, and kept cars away... but in doing so, he ruined an entire field....and my dears, America needs these fields.

ED

I'll say. I just read a report from the Tennessee Extension Service telling about how much damage soil erosion has already done to our state.

JIM

That reminds me. Do you want to hear one more story?

MARIAN AND ED

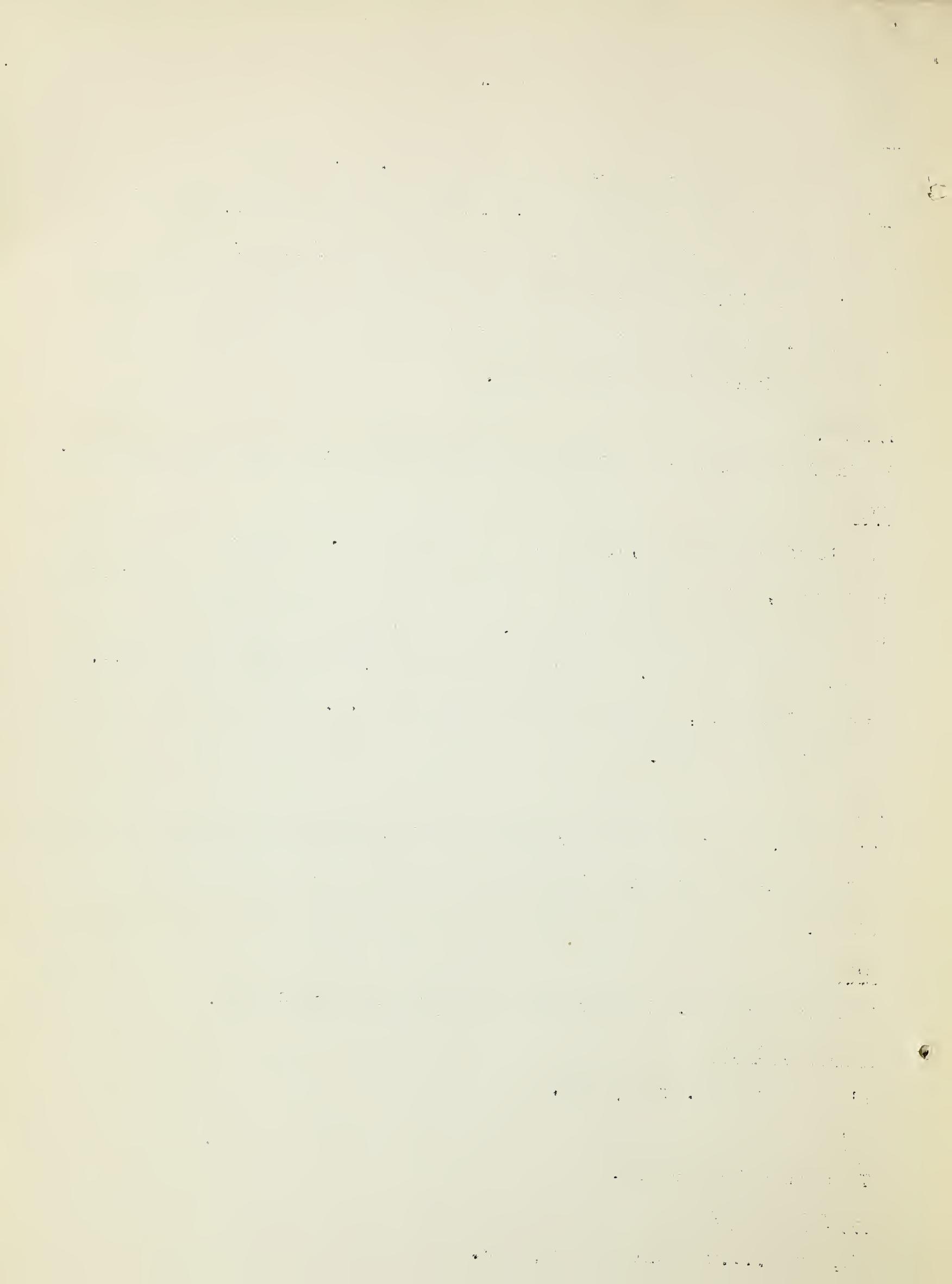
I'll say we do, sure, etc.

JIM

This is a true story.

MARIAN AND ED

Oh, sure....we believe you, etc.



JIM

This is a true story. And if you don't believe me, ask Harry Cottrell...he's the county agricultural agent who's been in Hickman County, Tennessee so long he won't say just how long...I'm going to play the part of Harry Cottrell....

ED

What? Another play?

JIM

Yes, and you're to play Dennis Cannon. And as for you, Marian...

MARIAN

I know....I'm to be his wife....

JIM

Dutiful, and obedient, and...very much of a help.

ED

Hmn...her a help?

JIM

If I may say so, Ed, Marian has been very much of a help to you.

MARIAN (TAUNTING)

There, Smarty!

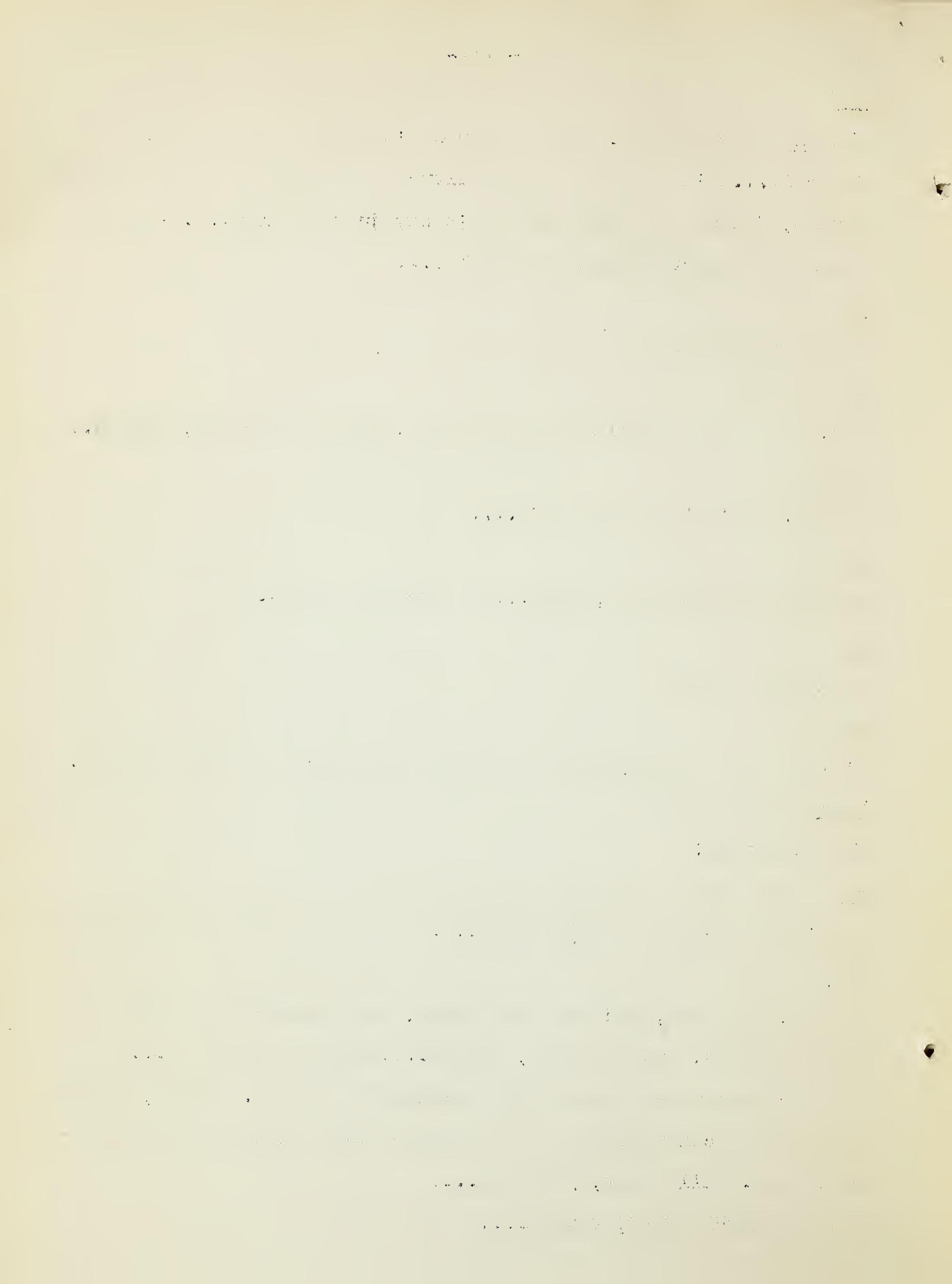
ED

Yeah? How about that time that....

JIM

Listen, my dears, and you shall hear, and re-enact the story of Dennis Cannon, and his wife, Edythe....Attention please....The pioneers conquered America with flintlock and axe. Today, Dennis Cannon is reconquering the same country with phosphate and lime--plus work. All right, your cue....

ORGAN: MOURNFUL MUSIC, fading....



EDYTHE

That's it, huh?

DENNIS

That's it, Edythe. I reckon I've got someting of a responsibility, here...a run-down farm, debt, and....a wife.

EDYTHE

I'm not worrying about that, Dennis. This is the farm you were born on, isn't it.

DENNIS

Yes.

EDYTHE

Then I know you'll do everything you can to build it up.

DENNIS (SUDDENLY SORROWFUL)

Oh, Edie...the land looks so rotten. The buildings are nothing more than shambles. But....(BRIGHTLY)....Edie...

EDYTHE

Yes?

DENNIS

We'll find a way.

ORGAN: BRIEF BRIDGE DENOTING LAPSE OF TIME.

COTTRELL

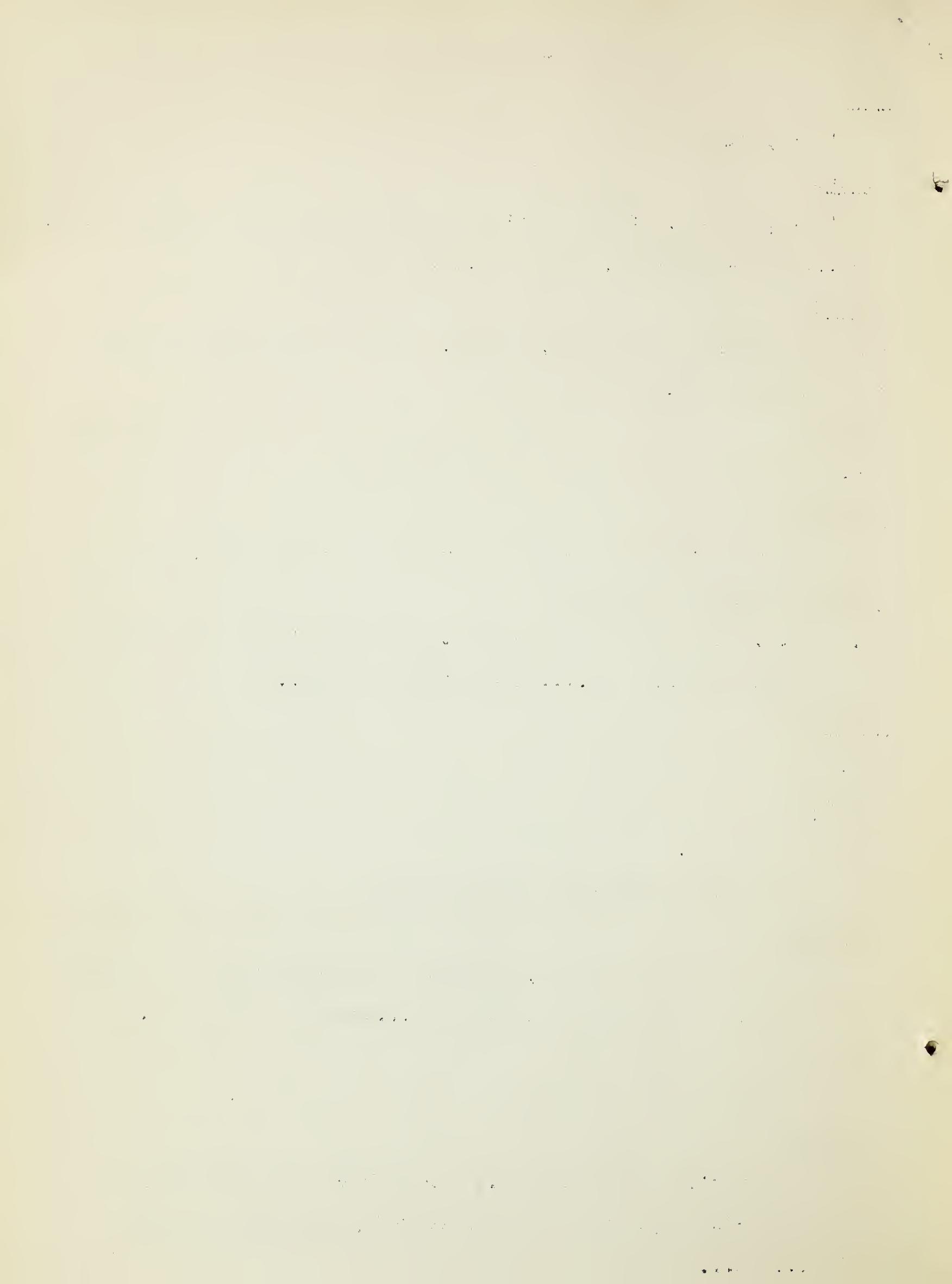
I know your farm pretty well, Dennis. Twenty-two years of share cropping have made matters mighty bad....gullies waist deep.

DENNIS

You're telling me.

COTTRELL

But I know you've been a worker. I remember the time when you were a 4-H club boy, and how you invested your money in grade cattle...and...



DENNIS

Well, I mean to be a good farmer. Now that I've got a wife, I have to.

COTTRELL

All right, here's your chance....last week at the Mays Crossroads Store we had a meeting. The Tennessee Valley Authority has some phosphate that it can use for experimental purposes. We asked the crowd last week to try it out, and not one would take it.

DENNIS

I'd kinda like to try it, Mr. Cottrell....

COTTRELL

I thought you would...

DENNIS

Sure....I've heard plenty about phosphate, and I know my land needs it.

COTTRELL

Dennis, for a new farmer you're about the best I've run into. Phosphate is the key plant food to a successful and lasting agriculture. And now that the TVA is making it available, you'll have a chance to prove to yourself, and to your neighbors, just that.

DENNIS

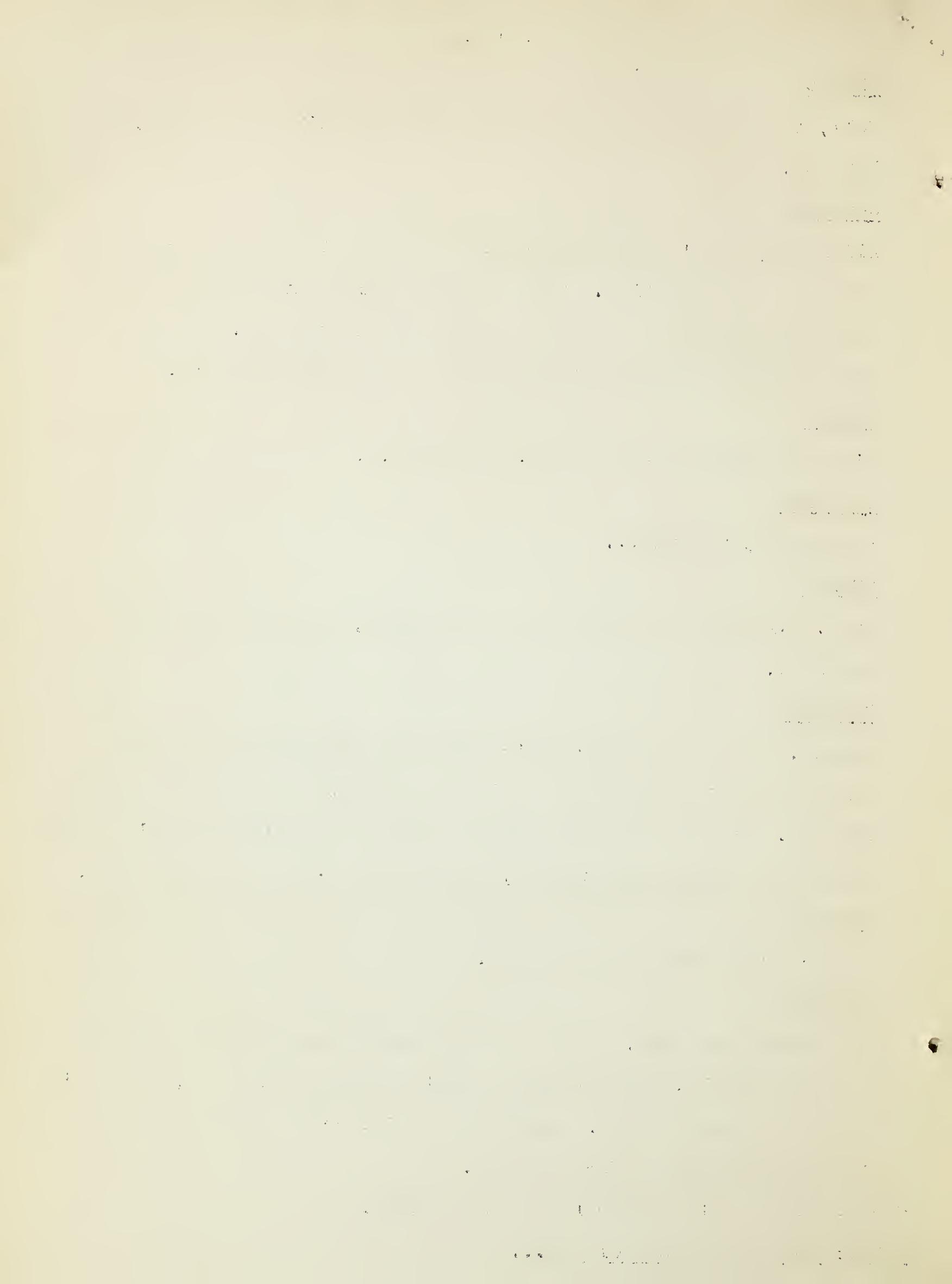
I don't have much money, though.

COTTRELL

You won't need much. The TVA will furnish the phosphate, if you pay the freight. And of course you'll have to buy lime, but you'd have to do that anyhow. And instead of barren acres, and tired land--you'll have a farm someday.

ORGAN: BRIEF BRIDGE DENOTING LAPSE OF TIME.

SOUND: Door opens and closes...



DENNIS

Any mail this morning, Edythe?

EDYTHE

A letter from the Farm Bureau....and I got a letter from the County Better Homes Committee.

DENNIS

What'd they want?

EDYTHE

Guess what! They're going to visit us on the tour next week.

DENNIS

Everybody sure is taking interest in this farm all of a sudden.

EDYTHE

They ought to! Look what you've done in five years. I remember the first time I looked at this farm, Dennis....I wouldn't even call it a farm then.

DENNIS

Yeah, there's been quite a change, Edythe....and the reason is phosphate.

JIM

And that's a true story, my dears. Dennis Cannon and his loyal wife built up an eroded, abandoned farm in just give years, with hard work, lime, and phosphate. And he's still going ahead. He's got a philosophy of life that I like, too. Better soil makes better crops. Better crops make better homes. Better homes make better people, and a better America for you and for me--and for those who are to come after us.

ORGAN THEME: I GET THE BLUES WHEN IT RAINS.

